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ABSTRACT

Individuals hoping to thrive in the workplace require resources and professional support that are responsive to their holistic needs and enhance their effectiveness in navigating continuous change. Career counselors are likely to be of greatest assistance to their clients when they take into account all the personal, mental, physical, and spiritual dimensions that affect career development. This is especially accurate for college students for whom the undergraduate years tend to be a significant time for both career and spiritual growth. This paper discusses a phenomenological study conducted with 10 undergraduate students using open-ended interviews. Two categories of spiritual issues--spiritual struggles and spiritual growth--were identified by students as having a significant impact on their career development. Four of the students said that the resolution of these struggles continued to be a predominate career development need. Six participants spoke about a significant moment during their career planning when they experienced a conscious recognition of the importance of their spirituality to their development as a professional. This moment involved identification of a personal value system. The study points to the need to include recognition, validation, and discussion of spiritual issues as part of career planning. (Contains 21 references.) (JDM)

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Addressing the Relationship Between Career Development and Spirituality When Working with College Students

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Addressing the Relationship Between Career Development and Spirituality When Working with College Students

Change in the workplace of the 21st century is rapid and many times, unpredictable. Within the span of two years the "new economy" has created overnight millionaires and then left them unemployed or returned them to the middle class (Associated Press). The work of any business now has far-reaching, global implications. Individuals hoping to succeed in this workplace must cope with limited job security and the expectation that they will experience multiple job changes over the course of their careers. Hansen (1993) posits that the related career development needs of individuals in the 21st century are based on the stressors they encounter and the coping strategies they must implement to negotiate this shifting world of work. One of the primary needs identified by Hansen (1993) is increased attention to spirituality and related issues in the workplace.

For many individuals spirituality does actively interface with their career development and workplace effectiveness. An emerging body of literature supports this premise. Knox, Langehough, Walters, and Rowley (1998) found a significant relationship between an individual's spiritual orientation or active spirituality and increased self-esteem, as well as possession of a greater number of personal resources available for growth and change. Other authors (Vecchione, 2000) have discovered a significant interaction between an individual's attitude toward career development and their attention to one of five life tasks associated with holistic wellness, spirituality. In this study, college students who did not engage in any form of spiritual expression or growth were also less likely to participate in or initiate any activity related to career development. Finally, Colozzi and Colozzi (2000) established that spirituality does play an important role in the career-related decision making of college students.

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In contrast, spiritual issues are minimally addressed in the career development literature as a whole (Stolz-Loike, 1997) and counselors are typically not exposed to coursework devoted to spiritual issues during their graduate training (Ingersoll, 1994). In order to address the career development needs of individuals in the 21st century, career counselors need access to information that not only recognizes spirituality as a career development influence, but that also describes how the two areas potentially intersect. In particular, the undergraduate college years are considered to be a critical time for individuals to make and commit to career decisions. This phenomenological, qualitative study attempts to at least partially attend to the need for information by describing the essence of the interaction between spirituality and career development in a college context.

Methodology

The phenomenological approach attempts to understand empirical matters from the perspective of individuals who experience the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Neuman, 1997). Through examination these experiences are reduced to a central meaning or essence of the concept at hand (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach is composed of three research processes: investigation of the phenomena, identification of general themes or essences of the phenomena, and examination of essential relationships among themes (Creswell, 1998).

Research Participants

According to Creswell (1998, p.111) "Participants in a phenomenological study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and are able to articulate the experience." Because of the need to identify college students who had the ability to identify and verbalize influences on their career development process, purposeful sampling in

the form of snowball sampling was used to identify potential research participants. Snowball sampling identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich (Miles & Huberman, 1994). When conducting a study using a phenomenological approach, Dukes (1984) and Polkinghorne (1989) recommend studying the experience of 3-25 individuals. Through snowball sampling, 10 undergraduate students were selected for diversity in majors, year in school, and family or religious background.

Data Collection and Analysis

In a phenomenological research study data is gathered from first-person reports of experiences and is typically collected through long, unstructured interviews with informants (Polkinghorne, 1989). Interviews are considered effective in generating data about participant concerns, feeling, and perceptions of their experiences (Miller, 1997). The purpose of phenomenological interviewing is to gain access to the meaning an individual makes of his or her experience (Seidman, 1998). This type of qualitative interviewing is based on the premise that "meaning is accessible when an individual reflects on the constitutive factors of personal experience" (Attinasi, 1992, p. 63). The focus of phenomenological interviewing is an individual reconstruction of an experience and reflection on the meaning created by that experience.

Following this model, open-ended interviews were the primary method of data collection in this study. A series of at least three in-person interviews and multiple follow-up e-mails was conducted with each participant over a period of 12 months. The longitudinal nature of the study was intended to take into account career and spiritual development as processes.

According to Moustakas (1994) the goal of phenomenological data analysis is to reduce textural meanings or the "what" of experience and structural meanings or the "how" of an

experience to a brief description that typifies the experience of a phenomenon for all of the participants in a study. Because all individuals experience the phenomenon in some form, it is a reduction to the "essentials" of the experience.

The raw data as recorded was transcribed verbatim for each participant. Non-recorded interviews were written up as field notes immediately following the data collection. In total, data collection resulted in 50 sets of field notes, representing 477 pages of data. Phenomenological analysis took place using the five-step process suggested by Moustakas (1994).

Findings

For the purpose of this article spirituality is defined as an internal phenomenon addressing issues such as the search for a sense of meaning and purpose in one's life, establishment of an intrinsically held value system that determines behavior, and participation in a community of shared values (Cornett, 1998; Kelly, 1995; Westgate, 1996). Spirituality also includes a desire for and the perception of connection to something greater than self, and may include reference to a higher power (Cascio, 1998).

Participants referenced two major influences on their ability to engage in career-related decision-making or implementation of their career goals. Two categories of spiritual issues, spiritual struggles and spiritual growth, were identified by students as having a significant impact on their career development.

Spiritual Struggles

Participants described two primary types of spiritual struggles that prevented them from moving forward in their career-related decision-making or pursuit of their degrees. Each of these issues interfered with students' abilities to look ahead and plan for their post-graduation futures.

For four of the ten participants, the resolution of these struggles continued to figure prominently among the career development needs they identified during the course of this study.

Search for meaning. Participants discussed reaching a point where their degree programs and future goals as they were currently defined lost meaning. For most participants this experience translated into previous frames of reference losing utility. This loss of a context for decision-making resulted in participants finding themselves in a "holding pattern" where they felt stuck or unable to move until they could find insight or develop a personal frame of reference. Sara, an undecided sophomore who identified herself as Native American, explained spiritual "stuckness" in the following manner.

> It's less about living in two worlds, but more about how I relate to the world. I believe that by virtue of taking from the world, I am supposed to give back. The question becomes how – Do I give back to my people or do I pay attention to the fact that there is a higher power over all people. I ask all these questions and I am still waiting for answers. I can't decide what to be or where to go until I know.

Participants also described their search for meaning as a lack of a sense of purpose or connection. More specifically, they reported a sense of missing a sense of connection to a greater vision or to others who might be working for a common purpose. John, a senior majoring in Business who described himself as a "first generation Asian American" spoke about this search for meaning by saying:

> There is a sense of nothingness beyond graduation. My choices in business seem to be more about money and less about people. I fell like I have lost my web of connection and am falling into a deep chasm, falling into a void. Business has been my identity. it makes me question who I am.

Loss of focus. Other participants shared feeling unclear about their intrinsic value system and thus, being overwhelmed when faced with choices or new information. This lack of clarity also resulted in participants questioning their career goals or feeling unable to fully embrace their current career direction. Alice, a junior majoring in Computer Science who identified herself as Latina, related how this stimuli overload translated into a seeming career immobility by stating:

> Information is coming at me from all sides e-mail, professors, the Internet but I do not have a reliable filter for sorting it out. I am missing a 'code' to assist me. By that I mean, I am no longer sure of what is important, what I believe. I used to think that I had a target, but now I question its worth.

Spiritual Growth

Six of the ten participants talked about a significant moment during their career planning activities where they experienced a conscious recognition of the importance of their spirituality to their development as a professional. This moment of insight provided participants with a foundation for understanding themselves more fully, as well as with a reference point for articulating personal approaches to career-related constructs such as success.

Identification of a personal value system. A component of participants' recognition of their spirituality was the integration of this personal dimension into participants' self- definitions. In the same regard, definitions of central career concepts, including success, were revisited and redefined by the participants based on internal, spiritual criteria, rather than external forces. Joe, a senior majoring in Education who described himself as African-American offered this perspective on his spiritual development.

> My parents believe that I wasted my talent by going into teaching. They tell me that I am the child who disappointed them, who let them down. But, I have finally grown to

> the point where my own beliefs guide me. I believe that the only way to change this world, to make it better, is to influence our youth. I consider myself a teacher. It's how I fit into the universe. My value of that place in the 'overall plan' guides me.

Realizing and pursuing a "calling." Participant narratives also consistently contained themes that suggested their belief in and reliance on the idea of a calling or vocation. In particular, participants correlated renewed personal energy with finding or communicating their sense of purpose and beginning to engage in activities that expressed that purpose. Anna, a junior majoring in social work who described herself as Euro-American, provided insight into the process of realizing a calling by sharing the following:

> There is a voice deep inside of me that comes from my Christian faith. That voice has led me to social service. I strongly believe that my calling is to create opportunities for people who did not discover them on their own. It took me some time to act on that voice, to really listen to it. For some time I tried to convince myself that I needed a more secure, nine to five, eight-hour day, kind of life. When I overcame that obstacle, I was able to acknowledge my calling and run with it.

Finding connection and spiritual community. Participants reported that a direct benefit of paying attention to their career and spiritual development simultaneously was a growing sense of being an essential part of a larger whole and of being a contributing community member. In this context, career choices had meaning not only to each participant as an individual, but also to the various collectives of which they were a part. Especially in the case of participants whom practiced an organized form of spirituality, the relationship between their career choice and their ability to potentially play a significant role in their immediate communities was viewed as essential. These same participants voiced both a conceptual and practical value and

understanding of interdependence. Lance, an undecided freshman who identified himself as being of 'multiple cultures and ethnicities,' spoke about spiritual community as a sense of purpose beyond self. According to Lance:

> The thing that keeps me growing right now is my Buddhist meditation. It keeps me focused on a path. I can't tell you my major, but I can tell you my path gives me one focus that extends into the future. I know that years from now I will continue in the work of the Buddhist group that I am affiiiated with and that my beliefs will influence my choice of major. What is most important is that I have a defined place in this world, that I understand my responsibility to others, and that I am something beyond my self interest.

Implications for Career Counseling

Role of Career Counselor

The study findings reinforce a number of traditional career counselor roles, but also suggest the need to expand existing roles or add new or differently defined roles to the career counselors' repertoire. Most obviously, the participant narratives emphasize the role of career counselor as empathetic listener, but also point to a need for expansion of this role to include recognition, validation, and discussion of spiritual issues as they relate to individuals' continued career development.

The second career counseling role suggested by the findings is that of career counselor as advisor and guide. The findings further illustrate that career development and spiritual development are on-going processes, rather then a series of outcomes. Within this orientation, career counselors serve as coaches or guides on a long distance, continuous journey.

Herr (2000) points out that an emerging career counseling role in the 21st century is career counselor as information resource. The importance of this role is reinforced by the study findings. A chaotic, changing workplace requires a reliable place for individual workers to experience grounding as well as secure the most current, accurate information regarding particular trends, workplace expectations, or marketable skills. Furthermore, the fluctuating characteristics of this workplace establish the need for a place where individuals, especially college students, may engage in vigorous testing of how realistic their career goals and plans actually are.

Finally, the role of career counselor as teacher is emphasized by the research findings. The participant narratives reinforce the importance of teaching effective decision-making. An integrated person makes choices based on mind, body, and spirit. In this case, the role of career counselor is expanded to include assisting or challenging individuals to verify that their career decisions pay due attention to each of these life domains.

Definition of Career Counseling Outcome

When spirituality is entered into the career development equation, one expected outcome of career counseling shifts from making a decision to defining how that choice will make a contribution to the collective (Savickas, 1997) or satisfy an individual's expression of purpose. Considerations of spirituality within career development also imply the need to evaluate an individual's overall "career health." That is, how is how is the individual's balance between the mental, physical, and spiritual life domains affected by their career decision and the implementation of related goals?

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Conclusions

Individuals hoping to thrive in the workforce of the 21st century require resources and professional support that are responsive to their holistic needs and that enhance their effectiveness in navigating continuous change. When career counselors take into account all of the personal dimensions, mental, physical, and spiritual, that affect the career development process they are likely to be of greatest assistance to their clients. This premise is especially accurate for college students for whom the undergraduate years tend to be a significant time not only of career development, but also of spiritual exploration and growth.

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